

Arts Council Bows Out Of Olympics

BY DAVE ANDERTON

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Soldier Hollow may be the county's and world's center of attention in 2002, but don't go looking for entertainment outside of the venue. The Heber Valley Arts Council has decided to pull the plug on a host of efforts to showcase the Wild West through special exhibits.

In a letter addressed to Olympic Coordinator Bob Mathis, the Arts Council chastised recent actions in which Mathis ordered several performances off limits. Those events included a Native American Pow-Wow, Cowboy Poetry-Western Music show, Western artifact exhibits, Native American crafts demonstrations, theatrical presentations by the Tony Award winning Utah Shakespearean Festival, and the Broadway-bound songwriter Michael McLean.

"Over the past several weeks these events have been either vetoed by you or someone in the SLOC organization has decided that we could not do one or more of these events or that they would do them," reads the Aug. 16th letter signed by Bob Donahue, president of the Arts Council.

Donahue continues, "During our meeting on Aug. 13, you made it very clear that you wanted one single event, a cowboy poetry style production starring the Bar J Wranglers, to be presented on 12 nights and be produced and financed by Tom Whitaker. In view of this decision, the Arts Council subcommittee becomes redundant. We therefore tender our resignation...We will uninvite the Utah Shakespearean Festival and Michael McLean, both of whom had graciously and enthusiastically accepted our original invitation."

Mathis was reluctant to comment about the letter, saying he didn't want to develop a "schism" between himself and the Arts Council. "I didn't think I vetoed anything," he said. "I hope the issue with the Arts Council is not closed."

However, County Commissioner Mike Kohler is more to the point. "Europeans aren't coming here for Shakespeare," he said, adding that outside entertainment venues will sell more tickets if an exhibit features a "good Western show." Kohler also insists that the Arts Council has not been eliminated from participating. "We are going to do what's best for the community," he said. "We need [Bob Donahue] involved."

But Donahue doesn't seem moved by the gestures. "Ever since Jan. 20, 1999 when Robyn Pearson asked me to head up the Arts and Culture Subcommittee for the 2002 Olympics, the Heber Valley Arts Council has worked to create a variety of events that would emphasize the Historic West and the Modern West," Donahue said. "Because the events which we had planned on doing would require months of preparation to ensure a quality production, the Arts Council will not be able to step in at the last minute and fill a void, should such a situation arise."